

State values health insurance

By the Helena IR - 12/28/06

Montanans appear to be rather evenly divided politically between Republicans and Democrats. Still, as the recent Lee Newspapers Poll showed, there's also a lot they agree on — particularly when it comes to government-subsidized health insurance.

No less than 83 percent of Montanans supported expanding CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, while just 12 percent opposed it. A program to provide subsidies and income-tax breaks to help small businesses provide health insurance for their employees was backed by 87 percent. A mere 6 percent was opposed. You don't see those kinds of lop-sided results very often.

Lee's pollster, Brad Coker of Mason-Dixon Polling, suggested that such numbers reflect the fact that people are paying steep premiums and being faced with ever-increasing rates.

"They just want something done," he said.

That's no doubt correct, but the figures also can be seen as a sign that a basic goal of conservative Republicans — to cut back a "bloated" state government — doesn't extend very deeply into the populace at large, at least when it comes to health care.

Although most of us have grown up being bombarded with scare stories about "socialized medicine," at the same time it has become apparent that the current system cannot provide health care that is affordable to many of us. And a major problem lies with the uninsured, whose medical treatment costs everybody else extra.

Attempts to find ways for government to address this problem are applauded by something like 17 out of every 20 Montanans. So much for disdain for our bloated, activist government.